

Home Office Video Teleconference Fact Sheet

The information below is intended as a guideline for arbitrators who wish to consider installing video conference hardware and software in their home offices. This guide is intended as a reference only – before purchasing hardware or software, each arbitrator is urged to contact a vendor or network representative to ensure compatibility. One problem that persists is the possible difference in technical specifications between and among the major video conference hosts available to arbitrators (UP, BNSF, NS, CSXT, and the NLRB).

The NMB Video Conference White Paper included in this package gives detailed information about video conferencing, and the Video Conference Sub Committee of the NARR will continue to research and distribute information to NARR members regarding home office video conferencing systems.

Minimum System Requirements

Each hardware/software package will clearly indicate minimum system requirements, but there are some generalizations that you should keep in mind. First, in the video conference environment, more really is better. Later versions of operating systems (Windows 2000 or XP), on machines with newer and faster processors, tend to be better than older versions. If you are running Windows 95 or 98, some systems may not be compatible, and if they are compatible it is possible that performance will be poorer than with later operating systems.

Line Connection Options

It is possible to engage in video conferencing using a dial-up modem and a regular phone line, but the quality of the image is very poor, and there may be problems connecting with bridges or other systems. ISDN lines, available in some urban areas, are the first choice, with DSL lines, also available in most urban locations, acceptable to most systems. Cable modem connections are high speed, and may be compatible with video conferencing. Pricing varies and is set by your local phone carrier or cable operator. Before purchasing any high speed line service you should contact the technical staff at one of the carriers to be sure your service is compatible with their bridge. (Note: In order to connect to the UP bridge, you must have an ISDN line.)

Hardware and Software Options

Off the shelf video conferencing hardware and software is available at virtually every computer store, and at electronics stores like Radio Shack, and through vendors who specialize in video teleconferencing. Generally the costs and complexity rise as you look at dedicated systems sold by teleconference vendors, but so does the level of service and support. A list of vendors is included in the Video Conference White Paper.

Price Ranges

It is possible to spend under \$100.00 at Radio Shack to get a camera and software and microphone that will enable you to video conference. It is also possible to spend several thousand dollars. The average cost of a good home system is probably in the \$300.00 - \$600.00 range. A list of vendors and sample system prices is included in the Video Conference White Paper.